

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE  
Newport, R.I.

ROTARY WING AVIATION IN THEATER ENGAGEMENT PLANS:  
CAN IT MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

BY

MAJOR ROBERT BANNON, USA

Submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

5 February 2001

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The U.S. military plays a key crucial role in shaping the international security environment in ways that protect and promote U.S. interests, but is not a substitute for other forms of engagement such as diplomatic, economic, scientific, technological, cultural and educational activities. Through overseas presence and peacetime engagement activities such as defense cooperation, security assistance, and training exercises with allies and friends, our armed forces help to deter aggression and coercion, promote regional stability and serve as role models for militaries in emerging democracies.<sup>1</sup>

The White House

Unified Commanders (CINCs) must consider the full impact of rotary wing aviation assets in their Theater Engagement Plans (TEP). Engagement activities, the focus of the TEP, are the crucial element of CINCs' ability to conduct peacetime operations throughout designated Areas of Responsibility (AOR). The National Military Security Strategy (NMSS) specifically states that CINCs must demonstrate the ability to shape, prepare, and respond to ensure strategic objectives are met.<sup>2</sup> The NMSS, combined with the strategic direction and allocation of combat forces contained in the Joint Strategic Capabilities Plan (JSCP), provides the framework for TEP development.<sup>3</sup>

In order to enhance the TEP process, CINCs must employ all available rotary wing assets and capabilities. With a limited number of aviation forces primarily dedicated to accomplishing engagement related activities, CINCs can not establish the required U.S. military presence without integrating a variety of service component capabilities and assets. To prove my thesis, I will evaluate three key areas associated with rotary wing aviation and engagement operations. These areas are planning, execution, and potential benefits. The examination of these three major areas will prove that the employment of aviation assets, in the TEP, benefits the CINC and the overall effectiveness of aviation units.

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<sup>1</sup> White House, A National Security Strategy for a New Century, December 1999, 11.

<sup>2</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, National Military Strategy of the United States of America, September 1997, 7.

<sup>3</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, Doctrine for Planning Joint Operations, Joint Pub 5-0 (Washington D.C.: 27 Jul 1997), 68.

Before looking directly at aviation's role in the TEP, first it is necessary to define what the TEP is and what are the categories as it applies to aviation. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) defines Theater Engagement Planning as:

"The TEP is primarily a strategic planning document intended to link CINC – planned regional engagement activities with national strategic objectives. The TEP is based on planning guidance provided in the Joint Strategic Capabilities Plan (JSCP). CINC planned and supported operations and activities produce multiple benefits in readiness, modernization, and engagement. However, peacetime military activities must be prioritized to ensure efforts are focused on those that are greatest importance, without sacrificing warfighting capabilities"<sup>4</sup>

Engagement operations, those activities designed to assist the CINC in meeting the objectives of the NMSS, are broken down into seven major categories: operational activities, combined training and exercises, security assistance, combined education, military contacts, humanitarian assistance, and other engagements.<sup>5</sup> Although it is possible for rotary wing aviation assets to participate in all seven areas, the priority for employment must be combined training and exercises. This is the area where forces can develop training objectives and concepts that will target aviation specific matters. In addition, combined training and exercises allow aviation forces the opportunity to conduct engagement activities not previously planned as part of a larger CINC or Joint Staff sponsored exercise.

### **Background**

The purpose of this paper is not to rehash the TEP process or evaluate its' effectiveness; rather, the purpose is to show how the CINC benefits from fully integrating rotary wing aviation in the entire spectrum of engagement operations. In a recent article published in the Joint Forces Quarterly, Grading Theater Engagement Planning, the authors clearly state that CINC must integrate all resources to enhance success;

"Although regional CINCs have authority over an entire area of responsibility

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<sup>4</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, Theater Engagement Planning, Chairmen of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Manual 3113.01, 31 May 2000, A-1.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., A-12 to A-14.

(AOR), they must rely on component commands, the services, and defense agencies to carry out theater engagement plans.”<sup>6</sup>

Geographical CINCs and respective staff elements can not alone accomplish the objectives of the TEP. It is up to service components to provide the resources to carry out designated objectives established by respective commands. The helicopter capability throughout the Department of Defense (DOD) is the most dynamic and capable in the world. Troop transport, submarine warfare, attack operations, combat search and rescue (CSAR), combat assault, and special operations are missions conducted by a variety of different platforms spread throughout the service components. The proper employment of these forces can make a difference in the overall effectiveness of the TEP. To illustrate my thesis, I will use the European Command (EUCOM) AOR as an example to link potential planning and operational factors to a specific region. Although the EUCOM AOR is a unique theater, the utility of joint aviation forces will apply equally as well to other geographical CINCs.

Why is engagement so important to each CINC? There are three major reasons that explain the importance of the engagement process. The first reason is that engagement is a primary means of enhancing the professionalism of foreign military forces. Throughout the world, a key issue for enhancing stability is the professionalism of foreign militaries.<sup>7</sup> Enhancing the professionalism of foreign militaries is a time consuming and difficult task. Engagement operations play a major role in accomplishing this task, but require the CINC to dedicate significant forces.

The second reason is since 1991, or post Desert Storm, engagement activities continue to rise and CINCs are struggling to find resources to meet all requirements. In fact,

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<sup>6</sup> Barry Blechmen, Kevin O’Prey, and Renee Lajoie, Grading Engagement Planning, Joint Forces Quarterly, Spring 2000, 99.

<sup>7</sup> Barry Blechmen, Grading Engagement Planning, 99.

the EUCOM Strategy of Readiness and Engagement specifically states there are significant issues with troop strength and shaping activities.

“Although the impact of this concept is large, the force structure dedicated exclusively to shaping activities is an extremely small portion of European troop strength. Engagement exercises can be manpower intensive but are of short duration and are typically conducted by in-theater response forces with augmentation from the reserve components”.<sup>8</sup>

Third, the world has changed significantly in the past ten years. With the cold war over, there is no clear threat to U.S. forces. CINC staffs are challenged to plan not only for conflict, but also for operations that shape the AOR to meet strategic objectives. General Peter J. Schoomaker, former commander of the U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM), highlighted the requirement to meet these new challenges by stating;

“To meet these challenges, we must leverage the best capabilities and potential of our armed forces. This will be a difficult undertaking, for as Joint Vision 2010 counsels, *we have to make hard choices to achieve the tradeoffs that will bring the best balance, most capability, and greatest interoperability for the least cost.*”<sup>9</sup>

The challenge remains balancing the training and readiness of assigned, apportioned or supporting forces, while focusing on TEP related activities. This is particularly important with respect to rotary wing support to CINC directed contingency missions. How do the service components expose helicopter forces to the numerous challenging flight environments they may encounter in support of these operations? One example is the reliance of the Marine Corps on helicopters to support Operational Maneuver from the Sea (OMFTS) doctrine. Marine Corps helicopter forces must now plan to fly directly to intended targets, bypassing the traditional beachhead. A deeper penetration exposes aircrews to terrain much different than that of coastal or beachhead areas. This changes the method that forces plan and train for potential flight related environments. This is only one example of

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<sup>8</sup> Wesley Clarke, EUCOM Strategy of Readiness and Engagement, U.S. European Command, April 1998, 40.

<sup>9</sup> Peter J. Schommaker, Special Operations Forces: The Way Ahead, U.S. Special Operations Command, 1998, 1.

challenges that face joint aviation forces. The integration of rotary wing assets in TEP supported events potentially provides a means to address these challenges while accomplishing the strategic objectives set forth by the National Command Authority (NCA).

### **Planning**

In order for the CINC to realize the greatest benefit from the employment of aviation forces, operational level commanders must evaluate the AOR in terms of balancing the CINC's overall objectives with getting the best joint/combined training for employed forces. The TEP is actually a JCS planning tool; therefore, aviation operational level planners must look at the broad guidance provided in the TEP and push requirements for engagement activities up to the CINC level. Commanders must evaluate not only the vital, important, and lessor objectives established by the CINC, but look at the AOR in terms of gaining access to areas that provide training environments specifically tailored to aviation forces.<sup>10</sup> One example is to evaluate the AOR by considering what countries provide training in the certain environments, such as desert, mountain, over water, and urban.

After considering the environmental factor, commanders should also evaluate what countries, throughout the AOR, possess aviation equipment that complements U.S. forces. The EUCOM AOR consists of eighty-three different countries encompassing the full spectrum of environments and aviation forces and equipment. The forces range from western style aviation units, employing doctrine familiar to U.S. joint forces, to countries employing rotary wing assets purely for internal public security. In fact, seventy-two out of the eighty-three countries possess military forces that employ rotary wing aircraft.<sup>11</sup> In addition, more

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<sup>10</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, Theater Engagement Planning, GL-4.

<sup>11</sup> Jane's for Intelink, "Aircraft Cross-Reference Index", <http://janes.ic.gov/cvgi-bin>, 15 Dec 00.

than fifty countries employ helicopters that are traditionally western standard or operate with NATO specific equipment.<sup>12</sup>

The remaining countries, primarily located within Eastern and Central Europe operate helicopters and equipment built in the Former Soviet Union (FSU). This is particularly important since Hungary and Poland, both newly approved North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) members, predominantly operate FSU style or non-NATO standard helicopters. These forces must convert to western style doctrine and compatible communication equipment to integrate with other NATO countries.

Another important planning consideration is the number of countries that employ helicopters found in the U.S. military inventory. The Sikorsky H-60, Boeing H-46/47 Chinook, AH-64 variant, and Bell series of helicopters are currently employed throughout the world by a number of different countries. As an example, the H-60 Blackhawk is operated by nineteen separate countries. These include Egypt, Morocco, and Turkey. The AH-64 Apache is employed by eight countries including Egypt, Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. The Chinook is found in the military inventory of ten countries. Finally, Bell helicopters are prevalent in Turkey, Greece, Austria, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Cyprus, and Spain. These countries represent likely small unit exchanges or exercises combining similar doctrine and equipment.

The final piece of the planning process results from selection of countries as potential training venues. Host nation equipment, potential training value, and country priority all play a major role in determining the best use of aviation assets in support of the TEP. By

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

evaluating all of the factors, operational level planners can produce a short list of countries and activities that may best compliment CINC strategy.

As an example, countries such as the UK and Netherlands employ the Apache, but climate and conditions can be dramatically different. Also, range availability, restrictions on night flying, and equipment availability vary by country. There are numerous combinations of planning factors available to select appropriate countries or regions for joint or combined exercises.

### **Execution**

While the planning aspect focuses mainly on how to best allocate resources throughout each AOR, it is the actual execution of exercises and military operations that remains the most important aspect of TEP. Major joint and combined exercises certainly are the major focus of the TEP, but smaller scale activities also produce significant results. It is not necessary to deploy large force packages in order to achieve decisive results. In fact, the trademark of U.S. Special Forces is the ability to employ small teams throughout the world. While the signature remains small, the positive impact certainly is noteworthy. This is the area that rotary wing aviation can make a difference. Smaller scale aviation activities are a viable option for the CINC. With a large percentage of countries that operate military helicopters, combined with diverse operating conditions present throughout the world, tremendous training opportunities exist.

Joint and Combined Exercise Training (JCET), bilateral exercises with host nation aviation forces, aviation maintenance training, and aviation crew exchange exercises, provide mutually beneficial results. The CINC increases U.S. military presence throughout the AOR while U.S. crews gain technical experience and diverse training. These exercises should



target the specific training objectives required by each service component assets. As an example, an exercise deploying one U.S. Air Force CSAR crew to Morocco takes advantage of the challenging environmental conditions present in North Africa. The exchange of selected Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures (TTP) with host nation pilots, combined with the area familiarization in country, is certainly a smaller scale effort that yields significant results. In the end, it doesn't matter what category of engagement an exercise falls under. The most important aspect is planning and executing activities that balance host nation requirements while enhancing the proficiency and experience of U.S. forces.

### **Benefits to CINC**

By incorporating aviation assets throughout the full spectrum of engagement operations, the CINC greatly enhances the overall effectiveness of the TEP process. Specifically, there are several major areas where the CINC benefits: training and readiness, host nation relations, foreign military professionalism, and interoperability.

**Training and Readiness:** The CINC benefits from the training and experience aviation forces receive during engagement activities by employing aviation forces in support of TEP. Maintaining a trained and ready force, while accomplishing the strategic objectives, is a priority for CINCs. In the EUCOM Strategy for Readiness and Engagement, the CINC addresses the quality of force issue by saying;

“The USEUCOM environment tolerates no compromises on basic service competencies above all, it allows no compromises on leadership. USEUCOM training, whether service oriented, joint or combined, is demanding and relentless, designed to instill both the competence and leadership required to master the complex operational challenges found throughout the theater.”<sup>13</sup>

For forward-deployed forces, especially in EUCOM, service assets are finding it more difficult, compared to earlier years, to maintain proficiency and readiness. Restrictions

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<sup>13</sup> Wesley Clarke, EUCOM Strategy of Readiness and Engagement, 8.

on overseas training areas, quiet hours, and lack of dedicated exercises are significantly impacting operational level commanders. The recent deployment of Task Force (TF) Hawk, a CINCEUR directed aviation deployment to support operation Allied Force, is an excellent example. In the formal After Action Report (AAR) prepared by the Joint Staff, the report raises the issue of readiness problems with aviation units deployed from Europe.

Specifically, aircrews lacked skill required to operate over terrain found in the Kosovo region.<sup>14</sup> The following comment was made by the Chairmen of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) reference the issue;

These units previously had trained for operations in regions with significantly different terrain and environmental conditions than those encountered in Albania and Kosovo. Apache aircrew training had been oriented toward areas that are predominantly open desert and have relatively flat terrain. Albania and Kosovo, however, are over seventy five percent mountainous and have terrain with fourteen degrees or greater slope. Apache pilots therefore had to develop navigation and piloting skills that were different from those previously emphasized.”<sup>15</sup>

One method to improve readiness is to look for training opportunities that combine specific training objectives with engagement activities. Throughout each CINC's AOR, there are numerous opportunities to train in challenging environments, while establishing relationships with host nation forces. The experience gained certainly benefits both CINC and the operational level commander.

In addition, the CINC's ability to respond is significantly increased by projecting aviation forces forward in engagement operations. In the future, it is unlikely CINC's will have a robust forward-deployed force to deal with contingency missions. Many of the traditional staging bases are now closed and CINC planners must continually look for suitable options to support deploying forces. Aviation engagement activities must

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<sup>14</sup> William Cohen and General Henry Shelton, Joint Statement on the Kosovo After Action Review, Department of Defense, October 14, 1999, 14.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 14.

encompass the full spectrum of deployment operations. Self-deployment, strategic air movement, and military sea lift operations, are all training objectives accomplished in the process of conducting support for TEP related activities. Logistics, maintenance, and sustainability of the force in remote areas will become increasingly more challenging as the number of staging areas decrease. CINC level planners and operational level commanders must look at engagement operations to shape and prepare remote areas to support future planning, operations, and contingency missions.

**Host Nation Relations;** The second major benefit is realized when aviation forces are employed to support mutually beneficial Department of State (DOS) and Department of Defense (DOD) objectives. Although not a primary mission for geographical commanders, support to Embassies and diplomatic missions throughout the AOR is certainly an important consideration. In fact, only USSOCOM specifically lists support to US Ambassadors, Embassies and country teams in the command's mission statement. The importance of this issue is the U.S. State Department has the primary responsibility for enhancing U.S. relations with nations assigned to the CINCs AOR. Often times, Embassies are the focal point for the planning and execution of engagement operations. It is through the Military Groups (MILGRPs), Defense Attaches, and Defense coordination offices, assigned throughout the AOR that CINC staffs rely on for guidance and assistance. The State Department, through their respective Embassies worldwide, is also primarily responsible for security assistance matters for foreign military forces.<sup>16</sup> This is a major challenge to balance the specific requirements and priorities of each Embassy while employing military assets to best meet engagement objectives.

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<sup>16</sup> Department of State, National Security Strategies, Summaries of the U.S. Department of State, 16-18

The question remains; what can aviation assets accomplish in this area to benefit the CINC? The benefit is derived from the mobility provided by aviation assets in support of Chief of Mission (COM) or Embassy objectives to reach out and engage remote areas in the region. This point is best summed up by the DOS International Affairs Mission Statement:

To advance the interests of the nation and the American people through foreign affairs leadership, the U.S. Government requires a strong international presence; a highly qualified, motivated, and diverse Civil and Foreign service serving at home and abroad; extensive communication with the public, both foreign and domestic; and the political, military, and economic means to carry out the nations foreign policies.<sup>17</sup>

If the overall goal is to secure a peaceful and stable environment, then the timely support of embassies and country teams can make a difference. Another benefit gained by the selective employment of aviation assets in support of DOS objectives is the enhancement of host nation relations. This may also open doors for the CINC and U.S. forces to train or gain access to areas normally denied to U.S. military forces.

**Foreign Military Professionalism;** The third major benefit is increased contact with foreign military forces enhances the professionalism of host nation forces. Traditionally, Foreign Internal Defense Missions (FID) are executed by Special Operations Forces (SOF); however, conventional forces can also accomplish this mission. The key issue here is SOF forces represent only a small percentage of the CINC's overall force, but are counted on to fulfill the majority of FID type requirements.

Not only are SOF forces in high demand, within USSOCOM there is only one aviation squadron dedicated specifically to this mission. CINCSOC is designated a supporting CINC and must provide support to all geographical commands. This limits the availability of specially trained and equipped aviation forces. The U.S. Air Forces FID Squadron, a USSOCOM asset, is designed to accomplish worldwide aviation related training

with foreign forces. With only one squadron throughout the entire DOD, it is imperative for CINCs to look throughout the service components to increase contact with host nation forces. By integrating other helicopter assets into this area, the CINC realizes a two for one benefit. Increased contact enhances the relationship, but U.S. forces also benefit from the experience.

In the following comment, General Schoomaker reinforces the role of SOF in these types of operations, but the end state can also be applied to missions accomplished by conventional forces;

The proactive peacetime engagement allows SOF to help host nations meet their legitimate defense needs while encouraging regional cooperation, maintaining U.S. access, and visibly demonstrating the role of a professional military in a democratic society.<sup>18</sup>

### **Interoperability:**

Interoperability with foreign militaries is a significant challenge. This is especially true since the recent expansion of the NATO includes former Warsaw Pact countries. The following comment by Barry Blechmen reinforces this point:

"The militaries in this region are well developed and most are oriented on the West; However, they are influenced by the legacy of the Warsaw Pact in Doctrine and equipment. Moreover, not unlike the United States, they are interested in bolstering defenses against any future threats from the former Soviet Union. One objective of EUCOM theater engagement is improved interoperability with militaries in Central Europe. Combined exercises and education thus assume priority in theater engagement plan."<sup>19</sup>

Countries such as Poland, who operate a huge fleet of Soviet style helicopters, are clearly behind other NATO countries in the ability to operate along side U.S. aviation forces. Communication equipment and different doctrine make it difficult to integrate into NATO operations. Aviation related activities, specifically designed to enhance interoperability, will help close the capability gap that exists. This remains true across all

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>18</sup> Schoomaker, 4.

<sup>19</sup> Blechman, 99.

services, especially with respect to U.S. Naval and Marine helicopter forces. With Naval forces counted on to project power early and often during Military Operations Other than War (MOOTW), it is imperative these personnel train with allied and coalition air components. The Army, which maintains the biggest fleet of helicopters and the most varied mission, also has much to offer in this area. This is clearly stated in following comment:

We should exploit and capitalize upon the unique contributions, which each partner can make. The Army has much to offer in the way of technical training, organizational concepts, and the techniques essential to modern management. But the guiding philosophy must be that our purpose has two essential objectives. First, we should help the allied force to develop to its full indigenous potential. Second, as is in the case with larger powers, we should work to perfect interface between our forces and theirs. Such an interface would facilitate combined efforts if our direct assistance ever becomes necessary.<sup>20</sup>

Much like the benefits derived from training other forces, U.S. forces receive training and experience throughout these activities. This is certainly a win-win for the CINC and operational level commanders.

### **Challenges**

There are potential challenges to employing aviation forces in the planning and execution of the TEP. The current high operational tempo (OPTEMPO) of aviation forces, lack of language and cultural training, and lack of resources, are all issues that may impact the CINC or operational commander.

**OPTEMPO:** Joint aviation forces are presently fully committed throughout the world. With Army Brigade sized Task Forces (TF) rotations already schedule for Bosnia and Kosovo through year 2006, and the continued high demand for Naval and SOF rotary wing forces, some would argue aviation units should not take on additional missions. In addition, with priority fielding of personnel to Korea, Continental United States (CONUS) and

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<sup>20</sup> Zed B Bradford and Frederic J. Brown, The United States Army in Transition, (Beverly Hills / London: Sage Publications 1985), 126.

European based units are not fully manned and potentially incapable of additional exercises or deployments.

While this is true, there are planning and employment methods available to mitigate the OPTEMPO issue. The first method is to reduce the size of deploying packages. Entire units do not have to deploy to host nation training areas to make a strategic impact for the CINC. In fact, smaller aviation packages of ten to fifteen personnel, utilizing one to four helicopters, may provide the best result for the resources committed. In addition, the use of host nation aircraft reduces the requirement to transport unit owned equipment, which in turn reduces the resources required to support engagement activities. Finally, a joint helicopter force, tailored for a particular engagement will also reduce the impact on one single component force.

**Lack of language and cultural training:** One of the major advantages for using Special Operation Forces (SOF) to conduct training with foreign militaries is the language proficiency of assigned personnel. The ability to effectively communicate with host nation personnel is a critical skill required for successful engagement. Conventional aviation forces normally lack these skills. This disadvantage is significant, especially when dealing with aircrew communication issues and aircraft safety.

Although this is a major problem, there are means to overcome the issue. Since English is the official language of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), the language barrier may be less of a problem with some countries. Also, many countries send pilots to the Army helicopter flight school, where English language proficiency is required of foreign pilots. Linguist support from embassies assisting the exercise or language proficient liaison officers also reduces the impact. Aviation planners may need to identify host nation

pilots that possess English language skills or rely on translators to assist during preparation and training. Finally, basic language training, for deploying aircrews may reduce the training impact of weak language skills.

**Lack of resources:** With funding decreased for aviation forces during the last several years, bilateral exercises with foreign militaries may be cost prohibitive. Unless the exercise is part of a larger CINC or JCS sponsored event, operational commanders will struggle to resource aviation related exercises. This is particularly true when strategic airlift is required to support the mission.

This factor may not affect forward-deployed forces as much as CONUS based units, but is still a negative impact. Planners should consider the use of aircraft already forward deployed available to support units coming from out of theater or consider the use of host nation aircraft to reduce the cost of exercise. Also, CINC planners should consider making funding available to support conventional forces in the execution of TEP specific activities. Another option is to schedule the exercise to run concurrently with other major exercises. Aviation forces could then utilize the existing logistical support put in place for the larger exercise.

### **Recommendations**

With the size of the force decreasing and the number of missions increasing, the prudent operational level commander must balance training, readiness, contingency requirements and engagement activities to best support CINC objectives. In order to accomplish this, particularly with respect to the employment of aviation forces, planners should consider the following recommendations:



1). Operational level commanders and staffs should aggressively pursue aviation related engagement activities in countries that balance CINC priorities with providing unique training opportunities for aviation forces. Also, aviation planners should develop a list of prioritized countries (for each CINC's AOR) that could potentially support the employment of aviation related engagement activities. The final phase is the selection of countries and dedicated U.S. forces (specific exercises). Exercise concepts should then be included in the annual CINC TEP update.

2). Planners should keep the exercises small and consider a higher frequency of activities versus larger scale exercises. Also, consider the maximum use of host nation aircraft and equipment to reduce the impact on an already over tasked aviation force.

3). The CINC and operational level planner should consider the integration of Reserve and National Guard Aviation forces. Particular emphasis should go to units apportioned to CINCs for contingency or operational support.

4). Include U.S. Embassy aviation requirements into the planning process. Although not a primary mission for the CINC, well placed support may open up a desired region for future operations.

5.) Joint helicopter forces should deploy liaison (LNO) teams to visit potential exercise locations. LNO teams must take advantage of the Security Assistance Office and/or MILGRP analysis of host nation rotary wing forces to develop exercise locations and participants.

### **Conclusion**

The employment of helicopter forces can certainly make a difference in the overall effectiveness of engagement planning and operations. In order to reap the benefits, Unified

Commanders must consider the full impact of aviation assets in their Theater Engagement Plans (TEP). The utility of aviation assets, wide variety of employment options, experience gained by deploying personnel, and the benefits to host nations combine to enhance engagement planning and execution. However, the benefit to the CINC is maximized only after careful planning and consideration on how to best balance readiness, training, and the employment of forces in the TEP.

The use of these assets as part of engagement strategy is certainly not an answer in itself; rather, the integration of conventional forces compliments the small percentage of SOF assets currently tasked to support TEP missions. As the number of engagement requirements increase throughout the world, CINC and operational level planners must plan for the integration of all available assets to meet the wide range of theater objectives. U.S. aviation forces remain the worlds most capable and proficient helicopter force. In order to remain a lethal force in the future, operational level commanders must train in the most challenging and realistic conditions available. Aviation type engagement activities, diligently planned to gain the most out of each exercise, provide the opportunity to gain this type of experience, while accomplishing the primary objective of engagement; overseas presence.

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2

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

1. Report Security Classification: UNCLASSIFIED

2. Security Classification Authority:

3. Declassification/Downgrading Schedule:

4. Distribution/Availability of Report: DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT A: APPROVED FOR PUBLIC RELEASE; DISTRIBUTION IS UNLIMITED.

5. Name of Performing Organization:

JOINT MILITARY OPERATIONS DEPARTMENT

6. Office Symbol:

C

7. Address: NAVAL WAR COLLEGE

686 CUSHING ROAD

NEWPORT, RI 02841-1207

8. Title (UNCLASSIFIED):

Rotary Wing Aviation in Theater Engagement Plans: Can It Make a Difference? (U)

9. Personal Authors:

Major Robert Bannon, USA

10. Type of Report: FINAL

11. Date of Report: 5 Feb 01

12. Page Count: 19 | 12A Paper Advisor (if any): None

13. Supplementary Notation: A paper submitted to the Faculty of the NWC in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the JMO Department. The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the NWC or the Department of the Navy.

14. Ten key words that relate to your paper:

Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, Aviation, Theater Engagement Planning (TEP), Helicopters, Planning, Embassies, Readiness.

15. Abstract:

Unified Commanders (CINCs) must consider the full impact of rotary wing aviation assets in their Theater Engagement Plans (TEP). With a limited number of aviation forces primarily dedicated to accomplishing engagement activities, CINCs must integrate all available service component capabilities in the TEP. By examining three major areas, this paper will prove that the employment of rotary wing assets, in TEP, benefits the CINC and the overall effectiveness of aviation units. First, this paper will evaluate aviation's role in engagement planning. Second, this paper will look at Aviation's role in the execution phase of operations. Third, this paper will examine the potential benefits of these operations as they relate to operational requirements. Finally, this paper will conclude with a recommendation to aggressively include joint rotary wing assets in the planning and execution of Unified Commanders' TEP process.

16. Distribution / Availability of Abstract:

Unclassified

Same As Rpt

DTIC Users

X

17. Abstract Security Classification: UNCLASSIFIED

18. Name of Responsible Individual: CHAIRMAN, JOINT MILITARY OPERATIONS DEPARTMENT

19. Telephone: 841-6461

20. Office Symbol:

C

Security Classification of This Page Unclassified